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SUBJECT: WASIT PROVINCIAL COUNCIL CHAIRMAN DISCUSSES
IRANIAN INFLUENCE, PC PARTY AFFILIATIONS

Classified By: Henry Wooster, A/OPA Director, for reasons 1 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Wasit reporting cable.

¶2. (S) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Speaking to PRTOffs, the Provincial Council (PC) Chairman alleged that JAM "special group" terrorist cells are re-infiltrating Wasit from Iran. The PC's Security Committee Chairman agreed and added his view that the JAM infiltration and attacks on US forces were aimed at general destabilization in anticipation of the elections. Both men criticized recent detainee releases much more forcefully than they have in the past - especially striking for the ISCI PC Chair who was exiled in Iran for many years and maintains close contacts there. Finally, the PC Chair suggested party affiliation among Wasit PC members was further weakening and that his own relations with local ISCI leaders were strained. His remarks about political parties illustrate the continued erosion of party affiliation in Wasit's PC. Provincial authorities clearly doubt that they can rely on what they perceive to be a corrupt and distant central government to improve the lives of Wasit's citizens. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

HEALTHCARE A PRESSING ISSUE

¶3. (SBU) On November 19, PRTOffs met with Wasit Provincial Council (PC) Chairman Mahmud Abd Al Rida Talal (ISCI) in al-Kut. Mahmud led off the meeting by speaking at length about his recent visit to India to organize a group of 12 Indian physicians to work in Wasit. The PC Chair said that healthcare would be an area of increasing PC focus, and that he hoped the Indian physicians would not only improve provincial healthcare, but help attract other foreign providers (including Americans) to Wasit. He criticized the Ministry of Health and Iraqi Ambassador in India for their lack of support, asserting that senior Iraqi diplomats were "self-interested" and did not care about the concerns and needs of regular Iraqis. Mahmud also requested US/PRT assistance in flying the Indians from Baghdad International Airport to al-Kut, stating that such assistance would enhance America's image in Wasit given public concern over poor healthcare services and infrastructure.

SECURITY ISSUES

¶4. (S) Turning to security issues, Mahmud told PRTOffs that the "secret" he had previously indicated he wished to discuss was the return of Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) insurgents to Wasit. The PC Chair alleged that a "second wave" of JAM extremists had recently completed training in the Iranian city of Qom and were now coming back into Iraq. Recent security incidents throughout the province indicated that the "special groups" cells had activated. Mahmud again decried U.S. detainee releases (a common theme among provincial officials at all levels), suggesting that certain prisoners scheduled to be released soon were JAM leaders who would quickly integrate with the new cells and threaten violence. He urged

the United States to take this threat seriously and cooperate closely with the ISF. (NOTE: U.S. officials meet bi-weekly with GOI officials at the Joint Subcommittee on Detainee Affairs to discuss the release schedules of U.S.-held detainees, persons of interest in U.S. custody, and the slow warrant return process by the GOI. END NOTE.)

¶ 15. (S) Shamil Mansur Iyal of the Constitutional Party, the Chair of the PC's Security Committee, seconded Mahmud's assertions and went further in his denunciation of malign Iranian influence. According to Shamil, the chief motivation behind the JAM infiltration is general destabilization of Qbehind the JAM infiltration is general destabilization of Iraq prior to the elections. The Security Chair said that attacks on US and Iraqi security forces were opportunistic, and that the actual targets were almost immaterial, the main purpose was instability and unrest, and any attacks which furthered these aims would be considered. On Iran, Shamil said that the Tehran regime feared a democratic Iraq as a model for regional change as well as symbol of American success.

"MOVING BEYOND" PARTY AFFILIATION

¶ 16. (S) Finally, Mahmud said that Wasit's PC was "moving beyond" party affiliation to rebuild the province. The PC Chair harshly criticized the national government and party politics, stating that, at least in Wasit, provincial authorities had to take matters into their own hands to affect any positive changes for constituents. When asked by Poloff to facilitate a meeting with local ISCI leaders, Mahmud agreed, but said half-jokingly that given his poor

BAGHDAD 00003098 002 OF 002

standing with the party's leadership, it might do more harm than good for him to intercede.

COMMENT

¶ 17. (S) Both Mahmud and Shamil have urged an end to detainee releases before, but this was the farthest either has gone with outright and passionate criticism of Iran -- especially striking for the ISCI PC Chair who was exiled in Iran for many years and maintains close contacts there. While he demurred on the source of his allegations regarding extremists trained in Qom, PC Chair Mahmud's remarks suggest it comes from knowledgeable sources within Iran itself. Only four days after this meeting and Mahmud's warning, a PRT mission was attacked by a sniper in an-Numaniyah, resulting in the death of an American soldier providing security for the PRT. The incident, coupled with other recent attacks and discoveries in Numaniyah, suggest the PC members' allegations may be correct. The Wasit officials' argument also reflects a schism between the two dominant parties of the Shi'a Iraqi National Alliance (INA), with the Sadr Trend pushing for faster detainee releases as its core campaign issue, and ISCI apparently fighting to slow them down.

¶ 18. (S) Mahmud's remarks about political parties illustrate the continued erosion of party affiliation in Wasit's PC. Religious and secular party members appear to work closely together (hence the ISCI-Mahmud and Constitutional Party-Shamil are close partners), and Mahmud and the Dawa Party's Governor Turfah have a good working relationship. Mahmud's joking reaction to Poloff's request and similar incidents could indicate that the technocratic PC Chair, widely believed to harbor aspirations for eventual national-level office, may well be on the outs with local ISCI leaders, and could even be positioning himself to eventually turn independent. At the same time, his near contempt for the GOI in Baghdad and increased provincial efforts to attract foreign investment and even conduct de facto trade missions without GOI assistance reflect deep disappointment with the current government. Provincial

authorities clearly doubt that they can rely on what they perceive to be a corrupt and distant central government to improve the lives of Wasit's citizens.

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